

Libertyville, IL - Congressman Mark Kirk (R-Highland Park) highlighted environmental concerns along the Des Plaines River during an expedition Saturday.

Flooding, water quality and river access continue to threaten the Des Plaines River's viability. Getting a first-hand look at the river, Rep. Kirk spoke with environmentalists and government officials, gathering data on environmental concerns for this critical northern Illinois watershed. Andrea Moore, Assistant Director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and members of the Sierra Club joined Congressman Kirk for the hour long tour. The expedition was held one day after the 330th anniversary of Joliet and Marquette's famous exploration down the Des Plaines that linked the Atlantic Coast to the Mississippi River.

"The Des Plaines River is the key to our history and environmental future. Learning the river's history and addressing its environmental challenges will lay the foundation for safe drinking water, habitat preservation and recreation for our kids," said Congressman Kirk. "I am making a special effort to accelerate solutions for this overlooked but important waterway."

Flooding continues to be the main problem for the Des Plaines River. A "100-year flood" occurred 17 years ago causing more than \$100 million in damage. The Army Corp of Engineers implemented a two-phase solution addressing the Des Plaines' flooding vitality. Full funding of these projects is the key federal, state and local priority for addressing flood problems and improving environmental quality of the river. Congressman Kirk is working towards that goal, requesting a combined \$4.78 million to sustain the Phase 1 and Phase 2 projects in the FY2004 budget.

Water quality and river access also continue to be problems for the river where municipal point sources, sewer overflows and urban runoff spill into the Des Plaines, causing the river's water quality to deteriorate. PCB's, Ammonium Nitrate and high levels of mercury are found in certain parts of the Des Plaines, threatening its ecosystem and the recreational users of the river. Dams in both Lake County and Cook County, antiquated in purpose, prevent the historic game fish of the river from reaching Lake County. The migratory patterns of the Des Plaines' native fish are disrupted by these dams, leaving Lake County kids without local opportunities to see the more famous fish of the United States in the native habitats. The deterioration of these dams also pose a significant problem for recreational paddlers, preventing contiguous passage throughout the entire stretch of the river. "By improving water quality, controlling flooding and helping users gain better access to the river, our kids can realize the river's full potential," said Congressman Kirk. "Developing a contiguous waterway, as navigable as Joliet and Marquette

found it, can yield significant economic, educational and environmental benefits. Working together, we can make this river a recreational treasure for anglers and paddlers throughout Lake and Cook county."

Kirk's expedition took place aboard the Canot du Nord (Canoe of the North), a 26-foot canoe replicated from canoes used in the fur trade era on the inland rivers of North America by the French during the 1600s. These canoes traveled the Great Lakes and Midwest rivers, delivering trade goods to trading posts and carried back the pelts and skins gathered over the winter by traders.